

-아서/어서

because; and then

Two meanings in one ending, and three restrictions that make it the most error-prone connector at this level. No tense before it, no commands after it.

How it attaches

Stem type	Form	Example
Last vowel ㅏ or ㅑ	-아서	좋다 → 좋아서
Identical vowel merges	-아서 absorbed	가다 → 가서
Any other vowel	-어서	먹다 → 먹어서
하다 verbs	해서	피곤하다 → 피곤해서
이다	이라서 / 여서	학생이라서
Never	no tense before it	갔어서 does not exist
Never	no command after it	추우니까 닫으세요 — not 추워서

Notes

The first meaning is cause: 배가 고파서 밥을 먹었어요. The second is sequence with a link — the first action sets up the second, and the two share a subject: 친구를 만나서 영화를 봤어요 (met my friend and, together with them, saw a film). Compare -고, which reports two actions with no such connection.

Vowel selection copies -아요/어요 exactly, merges included: 가 becomes 가서, 보 becomes 봐서, 마시 becomes 마셔서, 하다 becomes 해서.

Now the restrictions. Tense never appears before it — 갔어서 does not exist; the past goes on the final verb. And no command or suggestion may follow it: for "it's cold, so close the window," Korean requires -(으)니까. What -아서 does own outright is the set of fixed social phrases: 만나서 반갑습니다, 늦어서 죄송합니다.

Examples

- 1 배가 아파서 병원에 갔어요.
I had a stomachache, so I went to the hospital.
- 2 시간이 없어서 택시를 탔어요.
I didn't have time, so I took a taxi.
- 3 친구를 만나서 같이 밥을 먹었어요.
I met my friend and we ate together.
- 4 날씨가 좋아서 산책했어요.
The weather was nice, so I went for a walk.
- 5 학생이라서 할인을 받았어요.
I got a discount because I'm a student.
- 6 너무 피곤해서 일찍 잤어요.
I was so tired that I went to bed early.

Compared with

-(으)니까

Both give reasons. -아서 presents the cause as a plain fact; -(으)니까 presents it as the speaker's own reasoning, which is why only -(으)니까 can be followed by a command or a suggestion.

추워서 창문을 닫았어요. (statement) / 추우니까 창문을 닫으세요. (request)

-고

-고 lists actions with nothing tying them together; -아서 means the first leads into the second, and both clauses must share a subject.

친구를 만나고 영화를 봤어요. (two separate things) / 친구를 만나서 영화를 봤어요. (met, and watched with them)

-기 때문에

A heavier, more formal way of giving a cause, common in writing. Like -아서, it cannot be followed by a command.

비가 와서 못 갔어요. (speech) / 비가 왔기 때문에 가지 못했습니다. (writing)

Watch out

✗ 어제 아팠어서 학교에 못 갔어요.

○ 어제 아파서 학교에 못 갔어요.

-아서 never carries tense. The past is expressed once, on the final verb, and the time word 어제 does the rest.

✗ 시간이 없어서 빨리 오세요.

○ 시간이 없으니까 빨리 오세요.

A request or suggestion cannot follow -아서. Switch to -(으)니까 whenever the second clause tells someone to do something.

✗ 비가 오아서 못 갔어요.

○ 비가 와서 못 갔어요.

오 + 아서 merges into 와서, exactly as 와요 does in the present. The same happens with 보다 → 봐서.